Preserving Affordable Housing is Green

Young residents of Friendship Court in Charlottesville, VA play in their new playground. The National Housing Trust/Enterprise Corporation preserved this existing affordable mutifamily building and incorporated a range of "green" technologies that have led to lower utility and maintenance costs and a healthier living environment.

Preserving existing affordable housing costs less than building new housing and is energy and resource efficient.

There are many reasons why preserving existing affordable housing is sensible public policy. Chief among them is that preserving existing housing is the essential first step in solving our nation's affordable housing dilemma: Only when we preserve existing housing does every new affordable unit we produce actually 'add' to the nation's affordable housing inventory.

Saving affordable housing is also a good use of resources. Not only is preservation cost efficient, it's also fundamentally "green": Renovating an existing building produces less construction waste, uses fewer new materials, and requires less energy than new construction. Preserving existing housing also does not require new land development. Existing affordable housing is already located in developed areas where new utility systems and transportation services will not have to be created.

Incorporating "green" technologies helps to safeguard affordable homes and residents' health.

Renovating existing affordable housing also provides opportunities to integrate "green" technologies that make the buildings energy efficient, healthy for residents, and environmentally sustainable. "Green" technologies can be used to promote energy and water conservation, benefiting owners through lower maintenance costs and cutting utility expenses for low income families and seniors. The use

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of green design and materials, such as chemical-free paints, also provide a healthier living environment.

Incorporating energy saving technologies into affordable housing can also save taxpayer money. Each year, HUD spends approximately $4 billion- or 10 percent of its budget- on energy expenses incurred through grants to public housing authorities, utility allowances to renters, and housing assistance payments to building owners.[1]

State and local governments are increasingly providing incentives for integrating "green" methods into the rehabilitation of existing affordable apartments.

Each year, more and more state and local agencies recognize the financial and health benefits of environmentally-friendly building technologies and the need to improve existing affordable housing by incorporating these technologies when housing is being preserved. Policymakers are increasingly considering housing developers' use of "green" building standards when allocating scarce public resources to support affordable housing development. For example, many state housing finance agencies give priority to "green" affordable housing projects when allocating low income housing tax credits:

Maine. To qualify for tax credits in Maine, developers must meet minimum environmental standards including energy saving building envelopes, energy and water efficient appliances, healthy living environments free from toxic building materials or air borne mold, sustainable landscaping, and sustainable building materials.

North Dakota. The North Dakota Housing Finance Agency has made a commitment to environmentally-friendly development by embracing the Enterprise Green Communities standards when allocating tax credits. The Green Communities standards encourage the use of energy efficient building systems, appliances, and lighting, alternative energy sources, chemical-free building materials and recycled building materials. Recognizing that preservation is "green" to begin with, North Dakota does not require rehabilitation projects to meet all of the same environmental standards as new construction projects.

California. California's tax credit allocating agency has pioneered the use of incentives for sustainable and energy efficient construction methods in their tax credit program and promotes smart growth development, non-toxic building materials, water conserving fixtures and other eco-friendly strategies.

Other state and local energy efficiency and water conservation programs take a variety of forms, including:

- Renewable energy tax credits;
- Rebate programs for alternative energy sources, high efficiency washers and dryers, and low-flow tiolets; and
- Sales and property tax exemptions for alternative energy sources.

How is affordable housing preservation "Green"?

- Existing housing is already located in developed areas near transportation and utility services. No new infrastructure development is required.
- Rehabilitation produces less construction waste.
- Rehabilitation requires fewer raw materials.
- Renovating an existing building consumes less energy than demolition and new construction.

What are the benefits of integrating "Green" technologies in affordable housing preservation ?

- Healthier living environment for families and seniors
- Operational savings from longer lasting materials
- Lowered utility costs for owners and residents
- Saves taxpayer money
- Reduced carbon emissions

1 "Action Plan Achieves Objectives and Promotes Energy Efficiency", *ResearchWorks* Volume 4, Number 1, December/January 2007.

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